

# Community of Báthory Scholars & Enthusiasts



COBSAE is a community of enthusiasts dedicated to research, discussion, and the appreciation of one of history's most enigmatic figures, Countess Erzsébet Báthory.

## Greetings, Good People of COBSAE!

Still enfolded in the firm and frigid arms of winter, we dream of the warmth of the sun, the vitality of spring, and the sense of excitement that it brings. Thoughts of wanderlust and unusual places flicker through our psyches leaving us yearning for an adventure.

In this issue, our craving is satisfied as we are treated to a feast for wayfaring eyes by our very own Gary Rice who went in search of the Countess and shares his remarkable journey with us.

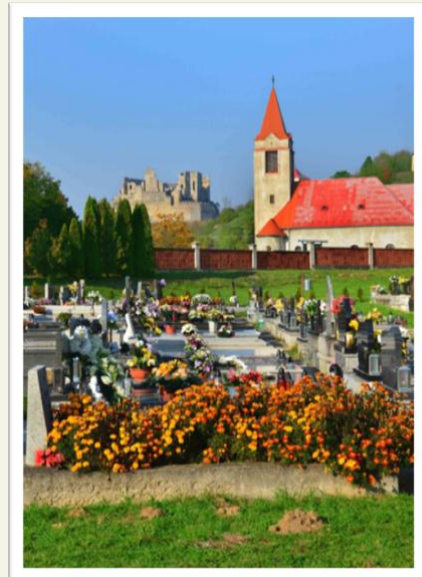
We also hear a few theories about where you think the Lady Báthory may have been laid to rest and ask you for your thoughts in our next segment of *Her Ladyship's History & Mysteries*.

As always, we would love to hear from you and make your contributions a part of our next issue! Feel free to write us at: [COBSAE@infamouslady.com](mailto:COBSAE@infamouslady.com). We also invite you to join our [Facebook Group](#) and like our [Infamous Lady Fan Page on Facebook](#)! Many thanks for your continued support and enthusiasm!

~ Liz Carrington, COBSAE Co-founder

## IN THIS ISSUE:

WINTER/SPRING 2013



Beckov Cemetery [Beckó] © Gary Rice 2012

*In Search of  
Erzsébet.....2*

*Her Ladyship's History &  
Mysteries.....9*

*The Last Word News &  
Reviews.....10*

## IN SEARCH OF ERZSÉBET: AN INTERVIEW WITH GARY RICE

*In October of 2012, Gary Rice went on a very special trip in search of the historical footprints behind the legend of Countess Erzsébet Báthory. His amazing journey through Hungary and Slovakia led him down breathtakingly beautiful paths. On the following pages, Gary kindly shares his experiences and photos with us and inspires us to consider our own unique passages into history.*

*“Whenever possible, I like to make trips that involve a historical quest.”*

*Sárvár Castle © Gary Rice 2012*



*“The past is like a foreign country; they do things differently there.”*

*Sárvár Castle at Night  
© Gary Rice 2012*



## IN SEARCH OF ERZSÉBET...

CONTINUED

**COBSAE:** What stirs you to go in search of historical figures?

**GR:** Ever since I was a kid, I have always been interested in History. Back in the late 1950s and early 1960s, movies like *The 300 Spartans*, *Ben Hur*, and *Spartacus* fascinated me, stirred my imagination, and inspired me to learn as much as I could about the great people, deeds, and stories of the past. King Leonidas of Sparta, the soldier king who led a small band of soldiers against the overwhelming forces of tyranny in the Pass of Thermopylae, was one of my earliest childhood heroes. Something about that heroic and tragic story moved me and stayed with me over the years; so it was an awesome and stirring occasion for me when, in 2006, I stood in that famous pass in central Greece and saw the very place where Leonidas and his men made their last stand in defense of freedom. I find it very stirring and inspirational to visit historic places like that. To soak in the ambiance and feel the air on your face in places where the dramatic events of history unfolded is something special, and it gives you an appreciation that you can't get from seeing those places in books or on TV.

I have been living in Italy for about eight years now; and I lived in England for four years before that. So I have had an incredible opportunity to travel extensively throughout Europe and the Mediterranean region in search of history. Whenever possible, I like to make trips that involve a historical quest. It is amazing where those quests have led me, and I have been to many incredible historic places.

*“...I have gone in quest of historical people like Hannibal, Cicero, Dante, Leonardo, Lucretia Borgia, Garibaldi, and Savonarola. But I must say, my search for Erzsébet was one of my favorite adventures.”*

In the UK, I went in search of historical literary figures like Dickens, Shakespeare, Robert Byrnes, Thomas Hardy, and Jane Austen; and other figures like Oliver Cromwell, Rob Roy, and Anne Boleyn. On a lighter note, I also tracked down all the places in London and Liverpool associated with the Beatles. I even went to the Heidi country of eastern Switzerland in search of that famous children's novel. In Italy, I am surrounded by the legacy of the Roman Empire and the Renaissance, and I have gone in quest of historical people like Hannibal, Cicero, Dante, Leonardo, Lucretia Borgia, Garibaldi, and Savonarola. But I must say, my search for Erzsébet was one of my favorite adventures.

**COBSAE:** What was the inspiration for your journey to seek the history and mystery surrounding Countess Báthory?

**GR:** I have always been fascinated with the legends of vampires and the story of Dracula. In the summer of 2010, I went on a trip to Romania in quest of the historical Dracula, who of course was a real Romanian warrior prince in the 15th century. I drove around for a week in Wallachia and

## IN SEARCH OF ERZSÉBET: AN INTERVIEW WITH GARY RICE CONTINUED



*Trenčín Castle © Gary Rice 2012*

Transylvania visiting places associated with Prince Vlad Tepes, the historical Dracula. Seeing how Vlad's story intersects with Bram Stoker's fictional vampire count was incredibly fascinating and educational. It was while I was researching and exploring the Dracula legend and sites that I happened across the name and legend of Countess Báthory, who I learned was reputed to be the female Dracula and the world's worst female serial killer. With her gruesome reputation as the infamous Blood Countess, Erzsébet struck me as someone worth further investigation. Did she really murder hundreds of young girls? Was she really a vampire? Did she really bathe in the blood of her victims?

In any case, she gave me a great reason to go on another historical quest, this time in Hungary and Slovakia, which are among the most interesting countries I have visited. Erzsébet was one of those historical figures that I wanted to discover and appreciate in a way that goes beyond the books and movies. I wanted to search for her on her own home turf and visit the places that she knew very well, the places where she lived and allegedly performed her wicked deeds.

I also discovered that the castles associated with her are quite impressive structures located in beautiful and scenic settings. This stirred my interest as a photographer and further inspired me to embark on this quest. And of course, Professor Craft's book served very well as my main source of factual information.

**COBSAE: Please tell us about how you began your trip. Which locations did you decide to visit?**

**GR:** I went on my Erzsébet quest for a full week in October 2012, during a period of beautiful and mild fall weather, when the autumn leaves were in all their colorful splendor. From Naples, Italy, it is an easy 80-minute direct flight to Budapest on Wizz Air, a Hungarian airline. I rented a car at the Budapest airport and drove about three hours to the town of Sárvár in the Northern Transdanubia region of western Hungary. Since Sárvár is the place where Erzsébet's nefarious deeds first came to light, and was the main home of her husband, Ferenc Nádasdy, that seemed like the best place to begin my quest. The castle has a nice museum dedicated to the Nádasdy family, and there is a large portrait of Erzsébet. From there, I drove into Slovakia just south of Bratislava, which has a nice royal palace on the hill overlooking the Danube. I stopped at Trnava, a quaint old town with several impressive churches and a Jewish synagogue, and then moved on to Cachtice [Csejthe], where Erzsébet's life of crime came to a sad end in her favorite castle. I visited the towns of Trenčín, Bytča, and the rustic village of Beckov [Beckó],

## IN SEARCH OF ERZSÉBET...

CONTINUED

which boasts one of the largest castles I have ever seen perched on a jagged rocky acropolis above the village. I also made numerous other stops in between the places associated with Erzsébet, like Trnava and Nitra in Slovakia; and Gyor, Komarom, and Tata in Hungary. They are all pretty places with their own scenic attractions.

**COBSAE:** Would you describe some of the sights and points of interest you came across?

**GR:** Of course. The main points of interest are the castles at Sárvár, Cachtice, Beckov, Trenčín, Nitra, and Bytča. Bytča Castle was the home of György Thurzó, the Hungarian palatine who was Erzsébet's long-time friend and the man who finally had her arrested. And the trial of Erzsébet's accomplices took place in the castle. There is a small research archive in the castle where I saw two of the original letters Erzsébet sent to Thurzó, and I had a nice discussion with the attendant there about Erzsébet's legend. She told me that a handwriting expert had examined the letters and determined from the writing that Erzsébet was an evil person.



*Beckov [Beckó] Castle © Gary Rice 2012*

Another point of interest I could mention is the local food, which I thought was really pretty good. Among the meals I enjoyed were several types of goulash, traditional Slovak dumplings with sheep cheese and bacon, cold cucumber soup with yoghurt and garlic, and pork schnitzel in potato dough with cheese.

*“Erzsébet was one of those historical figures that I wanted to discover and appreciate in a way that goes beyond the books and movies. I wanted to search for her on her own home turf and visit the places that she knew very well, the places where she lived and allegedly performed her wicked deeds.”*

*Bytča Castle © Gary Rice 2012*



## IN SEARCH OF ERZSÉBET: AN INTERVIEW WITH GARY RICE

CONTINUED



*Cachtice [Csejthe] Castle © Gary Rice 2012*

### **COBSAE: What was your favorite place and /or activity?**

**GR:** My favorite place was Cachtice. It's a fairly small village with a nice little museum that gives a good overview of the history of the area and also has a large portrait of Erzsébet on display. From the village, there is a long, narrow, and winding road that leads about a mile up the mountainside to a dirt parking area near the castle. From the parking area, it is a very pleasant walk to the top of the hillside and the castle. The hills and woodlands all around the castle are lovely, and there are beautiful panoramic views of the countryside all around. The castle comes into view just as you reach the top, and it is quite a sight to behold. It sits atop a steep wooded knoll and is the ultimate postcard view. I enjoyed a long stroll through the surrounding woods and spent a few hours

exploring in and around the castle ruins. Unfortunately, when I was at the castle, there were no signs or exhibits to explain anything. So I just let my imagination run wild in the ruins, and I was sure that I located the remains of the tower chamber where Erzsébet was imprisoned.

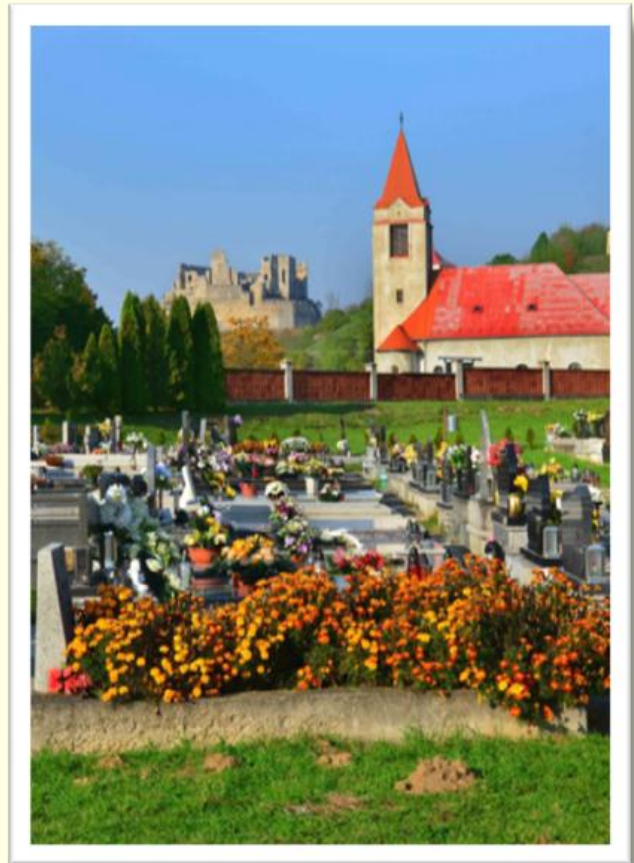
At the castle, I met a local Slovak couple who were also exploring the ruins. The gentleman could speak no English, but the lady could speak enough to get by. I had a very nice chat with her and asked her many questions about Erzsébet. I was curious to know what the Slovak people in general learned and thought about their Blood Countess.

She explained to me that she had learned all about Erzsébet in school. She said she believed that Erzsébet was the “Bloody Lady” who “did many crimes and was very bad,” but probably not as bad as the legends say. She said most people believe that Erzsébet killed some undetermined number of young girls but was certainly not a fiendish vampire who bathed in or drank the blood of her victims.

**COBSAE:** Your photographs are truly breathtaking and leave one with a sense of awe. What sensations or emotions did you experience during your visits and did any one place leave you with a distinct impression (either positive or unnerving)?

**GR:** I was amazed at how beautiful the places I visited were, especially in Slovakia. Beckov and Cachtice castles especially are truly scenic marvels in gorgeous picturesque settings in the Little Carpathian Mountains. They are both magnificent ruins that beg to be photographed. In fact, the entire trip was a photographer’s dream, especially with the autumn leaves. I really felt immersed in the life and times of Erzsébet when I was there, just like I did with Dracula in Transylvania. A British novelist once said, “The past is like a foreign country; they do things differently there.” The differences are what I love about history and traveling.

In every respect, my experiences on this trip left me with a positive impression. But while I can say that I got to know Erzsébet a lot better through this quest, I certainly



*Beckov Cemetery [Beckó] © Gary Rice 2012*

can’t say that I solved the mystery surrounding her. Just how many murders she committed or condoned cannot be determined; and the biggest question – WHY did she torture and kill those girls? – can never be answered with certainty. I know she wasn’t a vampire, but was she a sadist, psychopath, or sociopath; or merely an extreme product of her time? History leaves us only with debatable clues, not answers.

## IN SEARCH OF ERZSÉBET: AN INTERVIEW WITH GARY RICE

CONTINUED

**COBSAE:** How much planning would you say goes into creating an experience like this? Do you research the person, locations and times associated with them first? What would you recommend to someone who may be considering a trip like this for the first time?

**GR:** I always do a lot of planning before embarking on a trip like this. Of course, it helps to know a lot about the general history of the times and places you are going to explore. I have a master's degree in History and have learned to appreciate the value of research. So I do a lot of research on the people and places I want to visit, and I map out my travel route pretty thoroughly. I want to make sure I can accomplish everything I set out to do in the days allotted, and I want to ensure that I understand as much of the historical background as possible. But I also do something that I know most people are not very comfortable with – I usually wait until a few days before my departure to actually book my flights and hotel rooms. This is because I like to check the weather forecasts before I go, and I may wait until I get a favorable forecast. With my interest in landscape photography, I like to be reasonably sure I will have mostly good weather during the days of my trips.

*“I really felt immersed in the life and times of Erzsébet when I was there...I got to know Erzsébet a lot better through this quest...”*

I had no trouble driving to all the places I wanted to visit. I found the roads to be mostly good, and I did not encounter any crazy or erratic drivers. (And I have seen my share of crazy and erratic drivers in Italy.) Just do your research and have a plan that is reasonable to achieve within the number of days you will be there. Finding your way around to the Erzsébet locations is not difficult; but of course, it would be best if you had a GPS in the car with you. You can bring your own, or you can rent one along with the rental car. I found the people to be mostly friendly and had no issues with crime or bad behavior. The language barrier can be a challenge, although you can usually find people in the main tourist areas who can speak some English; but when you are out and about in the rural countryside, be prepared to encounter people, even at the Erzsébet attractions, who do not speak much or any English. I found it helpful that I can speak a bit of German, since I don't speak any Slavic or Hungarian.

While Budapest is a good place to embark on a search for Erzsébet, for anyone who would be coming from the states, it would probably be easiest to fly into Vienna and begin the adventure there. The Vienna airport is located well outside the city to the southeast, and from there it is less than an hour's drive to Bratislava. Renting a car at either airport is a very easy process.

All in all, I would highly recommend a visit to the Erzsébet country for anyone who is looking for a great historical adventure in a really scenic area of Europe that is somewhat off the usual beaten tourist path.



## HER LADYSHIP'S HISTORY & MYSTERIES

*In our last issue we posted the question:*

*“Where do you believe Countess Bathory was buried, if at all?  
What do you think may have happened to her body?”*

Our inaugural topic is a popular one as many questions and legends have popped up over the years as a result of the lack of evidence of where the Countess was finally laid to rest. Here are a couple of your thoughts...



*Báthory family church and mausoleum, Nyírbátor, Hungary*

**Euriel O'Connell writes:**

*Where does Her Ladyship lay?*

*If it were the answer of my heart I would dream that her prayers had some kind of answer, that Gabor Bathory's agents, pre-paid before his death, rescued her from her demise with cloaks, daggers and well placed bribes. A dream that her pleas to him didn't fall on deaf ears. It seemed clear to me in his last letter to her on the matter of the Procurator that he truly cared for her as family though he lacked the power to help her. Maybe that's why her remains have never been found at either of her reported resting places. That would be a happier end for Our Lady. Though for that eventuality her prayers would have to have relied on the most outside chance of probability. Though isn't this how all prayers are answered? Regrettably I think that it is far more likely that she died in her solitude and her body was buried in a place where she could be forgotten and King Matyas' greed could go on checked on his road to becoming Holy Roman Emperor. A gratefully forgotten blemish on his reign.*

*While I believe we will never know where Our Lady rests, there is one thing that we do know. Despite the best efforts of her persecutors, her end wasn't in her tower, immured within it's walls. For she slept for a time in the tales of peasants and the nightmares of children, then after four centuries she lives again, unmarred by legend, in the hearts and minds of her courtiers and courtesans of a time beyond her own who go by the name of The Community of Bathory Scholars and Enthusiasts.*

**J.J. Pritchett comments:**

*I wonder if she may in fact have been laid in the family grave but because of her crimes she may not have been entombed but rather simply buried on the grounds. Grave robbers may have been lurking and waiting to look for any jewels or family treasure she may have been buried with and then perhaps defaced the grave. Another theory could be that superstitious villagers may have exhumed the body in order to destroy it since vampire lore was the norm in those times and region. We may never know, but I would not be surprised if something ghoulish happened to her body.*



## THE LAST WORD

### NEWS & REVIEWS

If you've read *Infamous Lady*, *The Private Letters of Countess Erzsébet Báthory*, or *Elizabeth Bathory: A Memoire*, we'd love to hear your feedback! Please share your reviews with us at: [COBSAE@infamouslady.com](mailto:COBSAE@infamouslady.com)



“THE book to read on Countess Elizabeth Bathory”

This review is from Amazon.com: *Infamous Lady: The True Story of Countess Erzsébet Báthory*

“Kimberly L. Craft's *Infamous Lady* shows great promise in that it gathers the most detailed information possible on the Countess and through research and translation gives us what is quite possibly the most complete book and source on Elizabeth Bathory. Note that for her book Craft chose to use the countess' Hungarian and birth name Erzsébet instead of the Anglicized Elizabeth and she even states at the beginning of the book why she chose to do so. It's without a doubt the most complete book on Bathory and unlike most books this is not a fictional story, but rather about discovering who really was the countess Bathory and why and if she did those atrocities for which she has become a legend and that appealed to me very much. She worked hard to separate the legend from the myth, the number of victims claimed is not as high as it actually was and there was no indication that she ever bathed in blood for instance. She wants to paint an accurate portrait of her as much as possible and I believe it succeeds rather well at doing so. From the first look at the book you can tell that it's an independent, self-published book not that there's anything wrong with that. It's also one of the more scholarly works on the Countess you will find.

The content is fantastic for a reader who desires to learn about the Countess Bathory; her tale is fascinating and has been passed down through generations and finally a book delivers on her subject. It goes from the origin of her family, the Bathory name, introduces her parents, siblings and members of her family, the situation in Hungary and Europe, her childhood, her marriage, teenage years, rise to power, her husband [Ferenc] Nádasdy, her children, the events that lead her to commit those atrocities, witnesses, servants... everything up until her arrest and death. And then when it's over, there's more. A glimpse into Bathory's mind from the author and then the court trial and testimony of witnesses and so on. It's a terrific book although it may seem a bit complicated to the average reader at the beginning, I found myself going back a few pages many times when the author was going through the family history in the beginning because there are so many names and they're in another language and it gets hard to keep up. Afterwards it's more straightforward and not as confusing, be assured. So when I say this book is complete, well researched and is possibly the definitive work on Countess Elizabeth Bathory I do mean COMPLETE. As much information available on her as there is (and believe some of it must have been hard to find and needed translation), it's in this book.”

- T.S. Morais

Read the full review on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)



We hope you enjoyed this issue!

We look forward to your thoughts  
and feedback!

If you're a fan of the Countess and would  
like to contribute to a future issue,  
please let us know.

We'd love to hear from you and  
feature your contributions.

Please write to us or send your inquiry to:

**[COBSAE@infamouslady.com](mailto:COBSAE@infamouslady.com)**

**Many thanks to the members who have so  
generously contributed to the creation of this  
newsletter:**

**COBSAE Founder /Author, Kimberly L. Craft**

**COBSAE Co-founder / Production Editor, Liz  
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**Gary Rice, Euriel O'Connell, J.J. Pritchett**

**Features:**

**"In Search of Erzsébet" Gary Rice**

**"Her Ladyship's History & Mysteries"  
Euriel O'Connell, J.J. Pritchett**

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**Last Word Review: T.S. Morais**

